

## **Product counterfeiting and the media: examining news sources used in the construction of product counterfeiting as a social problem**

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Product counterfeiting has received increased attention due to its economic and public health impact. Media framing of product counterfeiting shapes how the public and policymakers understand the problem. While there is a large body of literature examining crime and the media generally, empirical studies have yet to focus on the media construction of product counterfeiting. This study presents the results of a content analysis using a random sample of newspaper articles referencing product counterfeiting in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* from 2000 to 2009. Articles were coded for common patterns in sources of information. While the results indicate the presence of a wide variety of themes, product types, and industries, government and business sources are overrepresented among the sources cited, leading to some level of consistency in the presentation of the impact of and appropriate responses to product counterfeiting. Implications for understanding how the public and policymakers understand product counterfeiting are discussed.

**Keywords:** media; product counterfeiting; content analysis

### **Introduction**

Product counterfeiting is the fraudulent reproduction of trademark, copyright, or other intellectual property related to tangible products without the authorization of the producer and motivated by the desire for profit (Albanese, 2011; Nasheri, 2005a). The consumer market for counterfeit and pirated goods consists of consumers either purchasing goods they believe to be legitimate, or knowingly searching for bargains with the understanding that many will be fraudulent (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2008). These can range from luxury goods (jewelry and apparel) to regular household items, such as pharmaceuticals, food, electronics, auto parts, music, movies, toys, alcohol, and tobacco products (Albanese, 2011; Nasheri, 2005a). Counterfeit products not only result in substantial financial losses to consumers, businesses, taxpayers, and investors, but also can pose health and safety risks to those who manufacture and purchase them.

Product counterfeiting has received increased attention in recent years as a serious crime problem among law enforcement, politicians, and news reporters. The global

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An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2011 annual meeting of the Midwestern Criminal Justice Association in Chicago, IL.

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counterfeit trade has been estimated to be between \$200 (OECD, 2008) and \$600 billion annually (International AntiCounterfeiting Coalition [IACC], 2011). Many unique qualities facilitate the production and distribution of fake goods, including ties to other types of illegal behavior. Over half of the purchases of counterfeit products occur over the Internet, creating problems for tracking and intercepting the numerous manufacturing and distribution chains (World Health Organization [WHO], 2010). Counterfeit goods undermine economies by denying income to legitimate businesses and creating an elusive underground economy funding criminal enterprises (Nasheri, 2005b; Siers, 2007; Trevorton et al., 2009). Product counterfeiting crime has the potential for seemingly limitless profit, as product demand can be filled by any number of diverse counterfeit operations (Fenoff & Wilson, 2009).

Similar to white-collar crime generally, product counterfeiting is characterized by fraud and has received minimal attention from criminologists. Even though product counterfeiting has wide-ranging economic and public health implications, few empirical studies to date have focused on the topic. With the exception of our article comparing corporate fraud and tax fraud to product counterfeiting in the news (Sullivan & Chermak, 2012), we found no research from other scholars to date addressing the media construction of product counterfeiting. This is a substantial oversight, given the portrayal of crime by the media is a major factor in how it is understood by the public and policymakers (Altheide, 1991; Chermak, 1994, 1995; Kolter & Roberto, 1989; Kolter, Roberto, & Lee, 2002; Lee, 1990). A number of research studies have examined white-collar crimes in the media (Cavender & Mulcahy, 1998; Clinard, Yeager, Brissette, Petrashek, & Harries, 1979; Evans & Lundman, 1983; Garber & Bowen, 1999; Goff, 2001; Levi, 2006, 2008; Lloyd & Walton, 1999; Lofquist, 1997; Lynch, Nalla, & Miller, 1989; Lynch, Stretesky, & Hammond, 2000; McMullan & McClung, 2006; Randall, 1987; Randall, Lee-Sammons, & Hagner, 1988; Rosoff, 2007; Stephenson-Burton, 1996; Swigert & Farrell, 1980; Wright, Cullen, & Blankenship, 1995), but this is insignificant compared to the voluminous literature on street crimes in the news. Research identifying common patterns in the representation of product counterfeiting in the media will enhance the understanding of how product counterfeiting is framed in news stories in relation to other types of crime.

We present the results of an analysis of newspaper content related to product counterfeiting. A mixed methods content analysis research design is used to develop explanations for how product counterfeiting is portrayed in two major American newspaper outlets. Product counterfeiting news may be presented in vastly different ways compared to traditional crime articles, particularly in regard to the use of sources and how those sources are used in news stories. While street crime stories rely mostly on criminal justice sources (Brown, Bybee, Wearden, & Straughan, 1987; Chermak, 1994, 1995, 1997; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987, 1989, 1991; Fishman, 1980, 1981; Gans, 1979), product counterfeiting articles rely instead on sources from private industry whose intellectual property is being stolen. How crimes are constructed in news stories can be determined at least partially through the sources of information consulted, which shapes public perceptions and policymaker decision-making (Chermak, 1995; Cook et al., 1983; Folkerts, Lacy, & Larabee, 2007; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). We explore how reporters use sources in product counterfeiting stories and examine whether this changes depending on the type of story involved. This article concludes with a discussion of implications for policy and theory regarding the treatment of product counterfeiting crimes by the media.

### **The presentation of crime in the media**

The existing research in this area is presented in two sections. The first section outlines the research related to the presentation of crime in the news. The second section extends the current literature on crime and the media to product counterfeiting.

#### ***Media and crime***

The study of interconnections between the mass media and crime is important for understanding the full breadth of how crime is portrayed and interpreted. Scholars tend to be in agreement that the media influence how the public perceives social problems they do not have direct experience with (Chermak, 1995; Folkerts et al., 2007; Lee, 1990). Crime news follows a socially constructed representation of reality that is ultimately presented to the public as an objective fact. Both the media and the crime influence one another, interacting to produce this socially constructed reality (Surette, 2007).

The influence of the mass media on the common understanding of crime occurs with the formation of a social construction of reality (Quinney, 1970). Social construction is a reflection of the collective experiences and reality of those who define it, resulting in a perceptive reality rather than an objective one (Meyer, 1975; Quinney, 1970; Surette, 2007). The media engage in social construction when determining the content of news stories, relying on the shared understandings and cultural attributions of crime held by the dominant group in society (Surette, 2007). News is situated within social, economic, historical, and political contexts, reflecting the respective positions of the larger organizations that own and manage each news company (Fowler, 1991). Competing constructions are largely filtered out, and only the dominant social construction is presented in a news article (Surette, 2007). Subsequent events following a similar topic that have been previously categorized are interpreted in the same manner, leading to selection (and exclusion) of certain events to be representative of a narrow, preconstructed ideology (Fowler, 1991). The goal of this study is to establish a rich understanding of how product counterfeiting is socially constructed in major newspapers.

Various factors have been found to influence the coverage of media content, including individual perceptions, organizational factors, economic and market factors, and ideological predispositions, all of which can interact to produce different types of contents (Folkerts et al., 2007). Galtung and Ruge (1973) found incidents were more likely to be reported as news if they were unexpected, local, dramatic, and negative, which tend to be definitive characteristics of crime. Chermak (1995) described newsworthy stories as being selected on the basis of the seriousness of the crime, the participants in the incident, characteristics of those producing the news stories, the uniqueness of the incident compared to other potential stories, and salience, or the location and frequency of the event in a local context. Newspaper ownership can also effect content through the amount of investment in recruitment, travel, and investigation, relationships with other special interest groups, or an ideology that is adverse to undermining the confidence of the business sector (Levi, 2008). Regardless of the differences among these complex factors, crime news dealing with issues related to deviant behavior and exercise of social control mechanisms to control those activities are generally considered newsworthy (Ericson et al., 1991).

White-collar crimes tend to be treated differently by the media than street crimes, with white-collar criminals being treated with some level of respect, while street criminals are framed in deviant, pathological terms (Stephenson-Burton, 1996). White-collar crimes have inherently unique complexities, giving the media a vital place in the social

construction and control of white-collar crime (Punch, 1996). However, media coverage of these crimes often fails to capture these complexities, focusing on individual actions instead of organizational or systemic influences (Randall, 1987; Randall et al., 1988). White-collar crimes are specialized topics requiring skilled and dedicated reporters to capture their unique explanations (Grabosky & Wilson, 1989; Stephenson-Burton, 1996). Print media tend to be the avenue through which white-collar crimes are covered in any great depth, as newspapers have more available space than television news (Chermak, 1995; Ericson et al., 1991). This makes newspapers a practical medium through which to examine product counterfeiting news coverage.

The distribution of sources and how they are used to shape crime in a newspaper story are important considerations in understanding how crime news is constructed. Sources are presented in the form of various crime themes determined through the news production process (Fishman, 1978, 1980) and reflect the routinization of the collection and dissemination of information into publishable news articles (Chermak, 1994, 1995, 1997; Ericson et al., 1987, 1989, 1991; Gans, 1979, 2003; Kollmeyer, 2004; Tuchman, 1973). Reporters have a wide range of possible sources to consult for framing different types of stories, and discretionary decisions made during the construction of the news determine how crime will be presented to the public (Chermak, 1994, 1995, 1997; Ericson et al., 1987, 1989, 1991). The interactions between news organizations and sources, the selection of news sources, and the use of them in articles are central to the identification of factors influencing newsmaking, allowing readers to appropriately contextualize news content (Manning, 2001). For these reasons, we will closely examine the prevalence and use of sources in product counterfeiting stories.

### ***Media and product counterfeiting***

Like white-collar crimes in general, product counterfeiting news stories differ quantitatively and substantively from street crime in how the media presents them. Crime news focuses primarily on violent street crimes (i.e., murder, rape, assault, robbery) (Fishman, 1978, 1980). The media tend to label crime narrowly to reflect only street crimes, following a “collective ignorance” on the part of social institutions failing to define business and state misconduct as criminal (Box, 1983; Jewkes, 2004). As a result, potentially more harmful and damaging white-collar crimes may not be given the same level of focus (McMullan & McClung, 2006; Stephenson-Burton, 1996). When it comes to crimes where organizations are implicated in the creation of social harm, news coverage can actually minimize the true nature of the crimes. In regard to the news coverage of crime by businesses, the costs tend to be underestimated (Reiman, 2004), corporate responsibility and liability are minimized (Wright et al., 1995), individuals are blamed as opposed to organizations (Randall, 1987; Randall et al., 1988), and reporters are reluctant to use the term “crime” to describe the incidents (Box, 1983; Lynch et al., 1989; Wright et al., 1995).

Companies committing product counterfeiting crimes are likely to receive similar treatment in news stories, although the coverage of product counterfeiting may be fundamentally different than other coverage of organizational crime. This is because one major victim is a corporation, which has a powerful influence on shaping news events as a primary official source of information. But much of the attention given to crimes involving business criminals focuses on the mystique of the offender instead of harms caused to the victims, especially when elite offenders are involved (Levi & Pithouse, 1992). When white-collar crime is represented in the news, coverage tends to focus on the power and wealth of those involved, not the actual harm done (Katz, 1987).

In addition to companies being involved in the commission of crimes, product counterfeiting has a high level of appeal for news stories due to major corporations being one of the primary victims. Katz (1987) discussed the newsworthiness of *currency* counterfeiting because it undermines trust in the economy and social institutions citizens rely on. Stories that threaten the collective identity and health of the community are prime candidates to be covered in the news (Katz, 1987). Similar to counterfeit money, product counterfeiting threatens the integrity of mainstream systems of commerce, as citizens are unable to trust the quality and safety of products being purchased. This is representative of a fundamental question for product counterfeiting: what happens if consumers cannot trust the basic products purchased from commercial businesses? However, product counterfeiting involves financial losses to businesses, so the harm framed in the news is likely to focus more on company profits than harms to potential users of dangerous fake goods.

Sources for product counterfeiting stories are different from other types of crime. Information is most likely to come from official sources in street crime stories, particularly law enforcement agencies (Brown et al., 1987; Chermak, 1994, 1995, 1997; Ericson et al., 1987, 1989, 1991; Fishman, 1980, 1981; Gans, 1979, 2003). Some studies have shown that over half of the sources cited in crime stories stem from the government (Chermak, 1995; Sigal, 1973). “Social control agents are motivated to participate as news sources to transmit their beliefs and values, and also to legitimize themselves with the public” (Chermak, 1997, p. 688). Other potential information sources include specific businesses and industries directly affected by the counterfeiting of their products. These complex interactions between crime, the media, agents of social control (criminal justice and regulatory agencies), and business/industry executives are important to understand how product counterfeiting is constructed.

### ***Current study***

We examine product counterfeiting in two major newspapers using content analysis. We follow other media researchers by specifically searching one type of crime (see Fishman, 1978; Randall, 1987; Randall et al., 1988). While the majority of traditional crime stories are about specific incidents (Chermak, 1995), product counterfeiting coverage varies dramatically. These stories include specific criminal incidents, general stories about problems related to product counterfeiting, lawsuits between companies over the misuse of trademarks or other copyrighted material, and stories about product counterfeiting-related policies. Stories are developed through the bureaucratic and economic goals of the news organization, where routines are developed in order to efficiently use available time and resources to construct news (Chermak, 1994, 1995, 1997; Ericson et al., 1987, 1989, 1991; Gans, 2003; Kollmeyer, 2004). Reporters utilize sources in close proximity to the actual events in order to minimize the use of valuable resources (Chibnall, 1977; Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1973, 1978) and obtain information about socially significant and deviant activities to be used in the development of newsworthy stories (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Product counterfeiting news follows the same process. Overreliance on certain types of sources by reporters will make them less likely to question their accounts of the events (Chermak, 1997; Fishman, 1980). Furthermore, these sources seek to shape how crime stories are presented to serve specific organizational priorities (Chermak, 1997). Thus, both sources and story type are crucial variables that enhance the understanding of how product counterfeiting crime stories are constructed.

## Methods

To better understand the nexus of product counterfeiting and the media, this study consists of a mixed method content analysis. We conducted a detailed and systematic examination of newspaper content referencing product counterfeiting. This section outlines the methodology used in the current study, including the sample selection and data collection, coding, and analysis.

### *Sample selection and data collection*

A multistage, purposive sampling strategy was utilized. This process ensured a manageable number of relevant articles. The goal is to offer a detailed, qualitative examination of the content of product counterfeiting-related articles. All cases had to be related to the United States, either originating in the United States or affecting American citizens, companies, or government in some fashion. Selecting impact on the United States as the focal point allowed for more clear and refined attention to one country. The scope of the articles naturally extended internationally due to the prevalence of overseas elements on the American product counterfeiting problem, both in terms of the counterfeiting of goods made by US companies and shipments of goods to the United States from foreign counterfeiters.

The *New York Times* (NYT) and the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) were selected because of their status as prestigious national newspapers. NYT is generally considered as a comprehensive and reliable newspaper indicative of national media coverage (Chermak & Gruenewald, 2006; Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006). The WSJ is a national newspaper known for financial and business-related news coverage, making it an ideal paper to analyze product counterfeiting. The inclusion of two nationally recognized papers often considered being ideologically opposed guards against potential bias toward the coverage of product counterfeiting from either outlet by itself. These papers are used frequently in crime news studies, particularly those focused on business-related crimes (Cavender & Mulcahy, 1998; Wright et al., 1995). While the selection of these two papers introduces notable limitations due to their scope and geographic location, their use provides an interesting contrast for analysis in this study.

A fairly expansive definition of what constitutes a product counterfeiting article was used to be consistent with prior research on general crime news stories (Chermak, 1995; Graber, 1980). These include stories from all jurisdiction levels, specific crime incident stories, stories discussing crime policies, or other broad stories about the topic (Chermak, 1995). One notable difference from much of the prior crime news research is the inclusion of noncriminal stories related to product counterfeiting crimes. The goal of this research is to understand how the media addresses product counterfeiting and responsibilities for addressing product counterfeiting and related crimes in the formal criminal justice system.

We conducted a content-specific search in the *Factiva* newspaper database for articles in the two newspapers. Articles from 2000 to 2009 were selected to obtain a broad and relatively recent representation and avoid potential bias from selecting a more limited time frame. Variations of the term counterfeit were searched, including “counterfeit,” “counterfeiting,” “counterfeiter,” “counterfeiters,” “counterfeits,” and “counterfeited,” resulting in a total of 1985 articles containing at least one of these terms. While we do not suggest this search strategy has identified all cases related to product counterfeiting in these two newspapers, it did provide a sufficient number of potential articles related to the problem.



Several criteria were established to avoid the inclusion of irrelevant material. First, articles mentioning product counterfeiting in only one sentence were excluded. The brief mention of product counterfeiting in an article compared to other topics indicated the article did not pertain to product counterfeiting as a primary topic and would not lead to meaningful analysis if included. Second and related, the articles had to contain material directly relevant to product counterfeiting. Those only tangentially related were eliminated. This includes articles focused on another type of crime or policy that very briefly mention product counterfeiting as a side issue, or articles about a new company action that, among many other general aims, could curb potential product counterfeiting efforts. Third, only actual news articles were included. Opinion articles, editorials, letters to the editor, question and answer sections, transcripts of official statements, and similar non-news story articles were eliminated. Fourth, only articles pertaining to the counterfeiting of a commercial product were included in the study. Articles about currency, documentation, and identification counterfeiting are not the focus of this study and were not included.

After applying these criteria, a universe of 423 articles remained, which was subject to further sampling. Due to the use of a purposive sample, the size of a final sample is important both for generalization to the entire universe of cases and ensuring the sample is able to adequately answer the research question(s) (Krippendorff, 2004). For these reasons, a 20% random sample of  $n = 85$  articles was selected using a random number generator. We consider this sample to be an adequate representation of our identified universe of relevant articles. This exploratory study of product counterfeiting news coverage will be valuable for generating future hypotheses (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

### ***Coding and analysis***

We utilized a mixed methods approach for the analysis. As previously stated, we found no work from other scholars examining product counterfeiting in the media. Established theory and methodology for examining the media construction of counterfeiting crimes are therefore lacking. For these reasons, a flexible methodology allowing for the formation of explanations through the discovery of common patterns was necessary to develop a full explanation of the themes. Content analysis was therefore chosen as the methodology for this study. Content analysis is “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1968, p. 608). Our study uses both qualitative elements identifying common theme patterns and quantitative methods to provide descriptive statistics of the categories.

This thematic content analysis of the articles required both a comprehensive and flexible coding system. The coding scheme was designed specifically to capture the intricacies of product counterfeiting, with some variables being adopted from prior media studies (Cavender & Mulcahy, 1998; Chermak, 1995; Graber, 1980; McMullan & McClung, 2006). Coding was conducted using open coding, which involves a flexible interpretive process. Interpretations drawn from each article being coded are held loosely throughout the process, allowing for adoption of categories to reflect new information from each additional article and establish patterns. The coding scheme was continuously refined using inductive analysis to ensure the key themes in all the articles were correctly identified and categorized (Charmaz & Bryant, 2010; Katz, 1982; Rapley, 2010).

The data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), with conclusions being inductively drawn through a collective interpretation of the data. Themes were developed through the identification of

repeat patterns of coding categories and variable attributes in the data, which assisted in uncovering the underlying meanings behind the use of particular sources (Abrahamson, 1983). Developing inductive categories allowed these categories to be grounded to the data, which helped to generate connections to theory and prior research (Berg, 2007). Specific examples from the data are presented as quotations in the analysis to illustrate the connections between the content and the coded variables. Descriptive statistics are primarily used to demonstrate the proportions and frequencies of the appearance of each coded variable in the articles.

We used MAXQDA qualitative text analysis software as a tool to help conduct the content analysis (see Lewins & Silver, 2007; VERBI Software, 2011). The program allowed for better organization, systematic text analysis of the data, and coding within multiple categories. Once the articles were coded, we were able to use the program to retrieve the data by category, view memos created during the coding process, create typology tables of coded segments of articles, develop variables from the codes, and develop basic code frequencies. The various tools helped organize the large amount of data produced and increase rigor in the coding and analytic process.

After completing coding, tables were created to analyze similarities and differences in the types of sources used in each story type. These tables separated the stories according to the type of article, listing all the coded segments of each article pertaining to that story and source. Using these tables, we analyzed both the frequency of sources cited in each story type and what those sources were used to say in the context of the article. We focused specifically on comparing similar sources in the different story types in order to find patterns in how they are utilized to portray product counterfeiting to the reader (Berg, 2007). By systematically coding and analyzing similarly coded segments of data, a close connection to the original articles was maintained and rich explanations were developed.

## Findings

The findings are presented in two sections. First, we discuss the descriptive statistics of the sample. Second, we examine the typical sources found in product counterfeiting stories by story type, including differences in what the source categories are used to say.

### *Descriptive statistics*

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 illustrate the distribution of the sample data. Both the *NYT* and the *WSJ* are evenly represented at close to a 50% split between the two papers. The relevant portion of each story averages 765.89 words in length, and at least one of the key counterfeit search term occurs an average of 4.04 times in each article.

In order to describe the characteristics of the sample, we coded a variable representing the origin of product counterfeiting, describing where the primary source of production, sale, or distribution of counterfeits occurred. While several articles could fit into more than one category, we focused on intent and coded according to the majority focus of the article, not necessarily a particular incident at a particular time and place. We identified four major categories: domestic, international, Internet, and China. Originally, only domestic and international cases were coded, but China and the Internet are two primary origins uncovered during the coding process that we felt important to include as separate categories due to their frequent occurrence in the data. Crimes originating online were becoming more prominent during the coding process as more commerce is being conducted over



Table 1. Descriptive statistics of product counterfeiting articles,  $n = 85$ .

Variable	<i>N</i>	Range	Mean	SD
Story type				
Descriptive	39	1.00	0.46	0.38
Incident	15	1.00	0.18	0.38
Policy/legal	31	1.00	0.36	0.48
Newspaper				
<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	39	1.00	0.46	0.50
<i>New York Times</i>	46	1.00	0.54	0.50
Product counterfeiting type				
General product counterfeiting	13	1.00	0.15	0.36
Pharmaceutical	16	1.00	0.19	0.39
Movies/music/books/artwork	14	1.00	0.16	0.37
Software/electronics	5	1.00	0.06	0.24
Luxury	16	1.00	0.19	0.39
Tobacco/alcohol	8	1.00	0.09	0.29
Automotive	1	1.00	0.01	0.11
Household/apparel	7	1.00	0.08	0.28
Food/beverage/agricultural	3	1.00	0.04	0.19
Product coupons	2	1.00	0.02	0.15
Origin				
Domestic	37	1.00	0.44	0.50
International	17	1.00	0.20	0.40
Internet	11	1.00	0.13	0.34
China	20	1.00	0.24	0.43
Topic length (words) <sup>a</sup>	85	2883.00	765.89	519.06
Search term <sup>b</sup>	85	16.00	4.04	3.42

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Some articles contained multiple topics or were part of a series of stories in the article, so only the length of the relevant portion was counted. This adjustment only occurred in a small number of cases.

<sup>b</sup>Variable represents the number of times one of the search terms appears in each article.

the Internet, and a large proportion of product counterfeiting takes place in China due to the large supply of manufacturing exports moving from China to the United States. The distribution between international (including China) and domestic originations of product counterfeiting is equal, with each representing 44% of the articles. China by itself is the origin of 24% of the counterfeiting discussed in the articles while 13% originated online.

Another important consideration is in the coding of the types of product counterfeiting involved in the stories. Although there are many differences across products, we included every type in order to be inclusive with a broad overview of the product counterfeiting problem. Products include pharmaceuticals, music, movies, luxury goods, clothing and apparel, cosmetics, manufacturer's coupons, tobacco and alcohol, food and beverages, software, and electronics. While some stories focus almost exclusively on one of these products, others discuss more than one product type or contained information about product counterfeiting generally. The most frequently occurring products found in the sampled articles are pharmaceuticals, movies, music, and luxury goods, whose themes collectively accounted for 54% of all the articles. General product counterfeiting articles or those where no specific type of counterfeiting could be identified comprises an additional 15% of the sample.

To understand differences among types of newspaper stories, three story type categories were developed during the coding process: descriptive, policy/legal, and incident stories. Only 18% of the articles discuss specific incidents, while 36% focus on policies or lawsuits

Table 2. Percentage of primary sources cited by story type.

Sources	Total	Descriptive	Incident	Policy/legal
Industry	32.8	35.5	12.5	36.0
Criminal justice	15.6	8.6	66.7	8.0
Other government	9.9	6.5	4.2	16.0
Foreign government	6.8	8.6	0.0	6.7
Legal	6.3	2.2	12.5	9.3
Politician	5.7	4.3	0.0	9.3
Expert	9.9	12.9	0.0	9.3
Suspect	3.6	5.4	0.0	2.7
Other	9.4	16.1	4.2	2.6
	<i>n</i> = 192	<i>n</i> = 93	<i>n</i> = 24	<i>n</i> = 75

Note: *n* = number of sources cited for each type of news article, limited to top three sources in each article.

and 46% are descriptive in nature. The lack of incident-centered stories is a surprising finding, given this is the focus of many traditional crime stories. Each of these story types will be discussed in greater detail below.

### *Sources cited by story type*

Table 2 displays the primary sources used to support the information presented in each new story according to story type. Since more than one source is typical for each news article, the number of total sources is greater than the total number of articles. Only the three most frequent sources used in the article were recorded, which is consistent with previous research examining sources (Chermak, 1995). The most frequent sources were determined through a word count of the sections of each article attributed to each individual source. While all the articles included at least one identifiable source, 27 articles contained only one source and an additional 14 articles contained only two sources. A total of 192 sources appeared in all the articles. The unit of analysis in Table 2 is sources instead of articles in order to capture the different numbers of sources used. The primary sources featured most prominently in each story type and the results of the qualitative analysis examining what those sources are used to say will be addressed in the following section.

### *Descriptive stories*

Descriptive stories typically discuss product counterfeiting in a general sense, with topics ranging from a certain type of counterfeiting, impacts on industries, companies, and consumers, and potential solutions. They are not centered on a specific policy issue or criminal incident, as articles falling under the other two story types are. These descriptive stories are the most diverse and inclusive in terms of primary source categories, but industry and expert sources are the most frequently cited sources in these descriptive stories. Table 3 illustrates the use of the most prominent sources in descriptive stories.

By far, the most frequently cited sources for descriptive articles are industry sources. Industry sources consist primarily of individual businesses or industry organizations. They are primarily used to comment on the impact of product counterfeiting, methods used by counterfeiters, how counterfeit products are identified, actions taken by the industry to address product counterfeiting, and cooperative efforts between companies and other

Table 3. Use of prominent sources in descriptive stories.

Use of source information <sup>a</sup>	Industry (33 in 23) <sup>b</sup>	Experts (12 in 9)	Criminal justice (7 in 6)	Foreign government (9 in 9)
Identification/investigation of counterfeit products	19.6	17.4	0.0	14.3
Description/explanation for prevalence of product counterfeiting	16.1	26.1	15.4	0.0
Individual/group actions to combat product counterfeiting	14.3	8.7	15.4	9.5
Impact of product counterfeiting	12.5	17.4	7.7	4.8
Outline of arrests/charges/court proceedings/sanctions	0.0	4.4	30.8	19.1
Frustrations of addressing product counterfeiting	7.1	8.7	0.0	4.8
Product counterfeiting methods	7.1	8.7	7.7	9.5
Collaborative efforts between organizations	8.9	0.0	15.4	4.8
Policy statements	3.6	0.0	7.7	23.8
Other	10.8	8.8	0.0	9.5
	<i>n</i> = 56	<i>n</i> = 23	<i>n</i> = 13	<i>n</i> = 21

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Numbers are given as percentages of each use of the different sources. Some sources are used to convey more than one piece of information or serve multiple descriptive purposes within the article and are counted more than once under each relevant “use of source” category. Therefore, percentages do not correspond to actual number of sources, but rather to what the sources are used to say. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

<sup>b</sup>Displays number of times the source type is cited, followed by the number of articles in which the source is cited.

organizations and agencies. These sources are featured 33 times in 23 product counterfeit articles.

Sources commenting on impacts sometimes are used to frame the problem in terms of the impact on a specific company or the impact generally (12.5%):

Obviously our key competitor is counterfeit. (*WSJ*, 11/13/06, (*company*) *Aims to Foil Piracy in China with Cheap DVDs*)

Advanced technology and global manufacturing outlets have made fake drugs a big and illicit business that is literally poisoning patients. (*NYT*, 03/30.08, *The Drug Scare that Exposed a World of Hurt*)

These sources point to the enterprise involved with the trade of counterfeit products and frame the issue in terms of competition, lost tax revenue, harm to consumers, the promotion of illicit business activity, and effects on industry profitability. Other industry sources plainly describe the frustration of dealing with product counterfeiting (7.1%):

You close one (counterfeit-making factory) down, and it just opens up across the street the next day. (*WSJ*, 08/24/09, *Coming Home: Appliance Maker Drops China to Produce in Texas*)

These sources describe the demoralizing feelings of companies trying to stop product counterfeiting.

Industry sources also discuss the methods used by counterfeiters (7.1%) and how those in the industry discover counterfeit products (19.6%):

The company created a \$5 million bounty fund in 2003 for tips that lead to arrests of virus writers. . . . (Company employee) gathers intelligence on suspects and tries to lure them into the real world where police can nab them. He often trawls the Internet for clues to the identities of digital villains, mining discussion forums in different languages. (*WSJ*, 09/01/05, *Digital Trails: (company) deploys (individual) to Hunt Cyber Felons Amid Rise in Online Crime*)

The use of software, pirating of discs, posting forgeries on the Internet, and other forms of cyber-counterfeiting are pointed to as increasing the ease of producing fake products. Companies use their resources to track counterfeit production and distribution, monitoring online and physical environment for evidence. Methods of spotting counterfeit products is valuable knowledge for readers to be informed consumers and help companies create awareness about how altered or counterfeit goods can be identified:

Paddlefish caviar has a very distinct taste and a slightly muddy flavor . . . If you see cheap caviar you know it's illegal, meaning bootlegged, previously frozen or there's something wrong with it, and people who buy it are interested in only one thing: price. (*NYT*, 02/27/02, *Unraveling a Caviar Mystery*)

These sources describe counterfeit products that can be easily spotted and those that are hard for even experts to identify, representing the vast differences across products. Finally, industry sources are used to comment on industry efforts to work with other companies, agencies, or foreign governments to address product counterfeiting (8.9%):

Improved enforcement of antipiracy laws in China has made it more likely that a business based on sales of legitimate DVDs can succeed. (*WSJ*, 11/13/06, *(company) Aims to Foil Piracy in China with Cheap DVDs*)

These sources illustrate the importance of official social control agents in addressing product counterfeiting, and the need by companies for law enforcement to treat product counterfeiting seriously.

The second most frequent sources in descriptive stories are experts and other non-government sources. This includes those with intimate knowledge of a specific topic or field related to product counterfeiting, such as academics, researchers, authors, non-government organizations, or watchdog groups. Experts are cited 12 times in nine articles, and focused primarily on the efforts of independent watchdog or nongovernmental organizations and descriptions of the problem by academic university researchers or think tanks.

One set of expert sources cited in descriptive stories centers around watchdog organizations and individual crusaders against product counterfeiting. They describe their individual and group actions against product counterfeiting (8.7%) and the difficulties associated with identifying counterfeits (17.4%):

To protect themselves, collectors often employ consultants experienced with old wines . . . They try to trace the provenance of the wines. If a bottle's history leads directly and clearly to the producer, it may be a safer bet than a bottle with a murky history. And they carefully inspect the bottles. "We know how clear or fuzzy the labels should be, what the font size should be, what the cork should look like. It was an authentication tasting. Off the top of my head we had 17 wines, three of which I personally felt were outright fakes." (*NYT*, 03/07/07, *Inquiry Looks at Accusations that Wines Had False Labels*)

The information attributed to these professed experts in the area of product counterfeiting is diverse. Sometimes experts are asked to test whether a counterfeit product could be identified over a genuine product, and as in one case fake wines, experts are often unable to guess the counterfeit version. These expert sources further illustrate the impact of product counterfeiting, but also how others not directly related to industry are taking on a role in addressing product counterfeiting.

In other articles, experts are used to provide context for the broader product counterfeiting problem (26.1%) or provide explanations:

From 1986 to 2001, . . . (watchdog group) . . . reported only two cases of investigated or prosecuted coupon fraud. . . . However, in the last year and a half, there have been 93 such cases and the numbers are expected to continue to rise as the recession drags on and the Internet offers new tools for coupon fraud. (watchdog group) says the cost of these counterfeits has easily been in the tens of millions of dollars, according to a survey of 24 major consumer-products manufacturers. (*WSJ*, 07/01/09, *Retailers and Manufacturers Fight Coupon Fraud*)

These sources used the results of research to illustrate the prevalence of product counterfeiting and provide explanations for why counterfeit products have grown more common. These sources identified as experts provide information that is more general and focused on consumers than the industry or official sources, even though their inclusion is limited in other types of stories.

### *Policy/legal stories*

The second type of story discusses policy and legal issues related to product counterfeiting. These stories include a wide variety of sources, but the most frequently cited sources are from industry and government sources (noncriminal justice). The most frequently cited sources in policy/legal articles are displayed in [Table 4](#).

Table 4. Use of prominent sources in policy/legal stories.

Use of source information <sup>a</sup>	Industry (27 in 20) <sup>b</sup>	Other government (12 in 11)	Politician (7 in 5)	Legal (7 in 6)	Expert (7 in 5)
Commentary on lawsuits	20.9	0.0	21.4	10.0	11.1
Policy statements	16.3	36.0	28.6	70.0	66.7
Collaborative efforts between organizations	14.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Individual/group actions to combat product counterfeiting	14.0	4.0	7.1	0.0	0.0
Application of US laws in other countries	7.0	36.0	21.4	10.0	11.1
Impact of product counterfeiting	7.0	8.0	7.1	10.0	11.1
Other	21.1	16.0	14.2	0.0	0.0
	<i>n</i> = 43	<i>n</i> = 25	<i>n</i> = 14	<i>n</i> = 10	<i>n</i> = 9

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Numbers are given as percentages of each use of the different sources. Some sources are used to convey more than one piece of information or serve multiple descriptive purposes within the article and are counted more than once under each relevant “use of source” category. Therefore, percentages do not correspond to actual number of sources, but rather to what the sources are used to say. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

<sup>b</sup>Displays number of times the source type is cited, followed by the number of articles in which the source is cited.

Like descriptive stories, industry sources are the sources used most often in policy/legal stories. Industry sources are cited 27 times in 20 policy/legal articles and are used to comment on both the legal culpability of companies and actions taken by the industry to address product counterfeiting. Some of the industry sources in policy/legal stories discuss the relationships between companies, the role of different companies in the prevention of product counterfeiting, and the role of online commerce in the distribution of counterfeit products. These industry sources discuss legal issues between companies (14.0%) and product counterfeiting in a global context (36.0%):

What we're seeing is that counterfeiters are more effective in distributing their software globally and anonymously using the Internet. (*WSJ*, 08/02/00, (company) *Steps up Software Piracy War*)

The court recognized that it was demonstrated that the prevention of counterfeiting on the (the company) platform encountered serious difficulties in the area of perfumes and cosmetics. (*NYT*, 05/14/09, *French Court Clears (company) in Selling Fake Goods*)

These sources are used to demonstrate the legal issues involved with some of the methods used by counterfeiters, particularly online and transnational commerce. The role of online auction and purchasing sites in the prevention of product counterfeiting is a theme in several articles. Others discuss the role of the Internet in the distribution of counterfeits more generally, as displayed by the first source illustrating the enhanced anonymity and effectiveness of counterfeits to carry out their activities. Other industry sources are used to illustrate the actions taken by the companies themselves to address product counterfeiting (14.0%):

(The company) said it has stepped up its crackdown on software piracy in recent months and announced actions against 7500 Internet listings for allegedly pirated products in 33 countries. (*WSJ*, 08/02/00, (company) *Steps up Software Piracy War*)

(The company) has tightened its counterfeiting filters. The company says it now dedicates several thousand staff members and spends millions of dollars a year worldwide on such efforts. (*NYT*, 05/14/09, *French Court Clears (company) in Selling Fake Goods*)

These sources frame the responses to product counterfeiting in terms of actions by the companies themselves.

Other prominent sources in policy/legal articles are government officials. These other government sources consist of 16.0% of sources for policy/legal stories, occurring 12 times in 11 articles. Although regulatory agencies are also included among these sources, a total of 72.0% of sources are used to present the perspective of the federal government in the enforcement of intellectual property laws in other countries and other related policy issues:

This will be the most comprehensive effort ever launched to stop the trade in pirated goods . . . China is not the only problem, it is ground zero. (*WSJ*, 10/04/04, *US Prepares to Crack Down on Intellectual-Property Piracy*)

US officials discuss policy options related to international trade and intellectual property rights, anti-piracy and trademark compliance initiatives, trade negotiations, and possible new approaches are featured using statements made by those within the executive offices of the US government. These sources point to official policies that affect product counterfeiting through the prospect of legal and punitive responses, highlighting the role of government in addressing the problem. While some reference officials by name, others



cite officials close to policy discussions in the administration who wish to be anonymous, perhaps in advance of an official policy announcement.

Surprisingly, politicians are not cited as frequently as other sources. These sources tend to consist of official statements made by the politicians, much like the information attributed to other government officials. Politicians are cited in 9.3% of policy and legal stories as opposed to 36.0% industry sources and 24.0% other government and criminal justice sources.

### *Incident stories*

The use of sources in incident articles is outlined in Table 5. Criminal justice sources are by far the most frequently used sources in incident stories, representing two-thirds of all the sources cited. They are cited 16 times in 15 articles. Specifically, local and federal police agencies and prosecutors are cited to provide information about the details of specific criminal incidents. The typical incident article usually involves a description of the arrest, charges, the scope of the product counterfeiting operation, and the current status of a case.

Criminal justice sources (35.3%) are usually cited to comment on specific arrests or the charges in a product counterfeiting case. The following are examples of the information these sources provide in these articles:

The police have arrested 28 men . . . accused of selling untaxed and sometimes counterfeit-label cigarettes to store owners in the Bronx, Yonkers and Manhattan, the police said yesterday. (NYT, 09/02/05, *Metro Briefing New York: Bronx: 28 Charged in Cigarette Smuggling*)

Some sources are used to describe detailed and systematic operations, while others describe single arrests. Specific details about the incident are provided by officials, including the size of the operation, the number of people arrested, and the monetary value of the goods

Table 5. Use of prominent sources in incident stories.

Use of source information <sup>a</sup>	Criminal justice (16 in 15) <sup>b</sup>	Industry (3 in 3)	Legal (3 in 3)
Outline of arrests/charges/court proceedings/sanctions	35.3	0.0	33.3
Identification/investigation of counterfeit product	26.5	16.7	0.0
Contents of counterfeit product seizures	17.7	33.3	0.0
Methods of product counterfeiting	17.7	16.7	0.0
Defense of involvement with product counterfeiting	0.0	0.0	66.7
Impact of product counterfeiting	2.9	16.7	0.0
Collaborative efforts between organizations	0.0	16.7	0.0
	<i>n</i> = 34	<i>n</i> = 6	<i>n</i> = 3

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Numbers are given as percentages of each use of the different sources. Some sources are used to convey more than one piece of information or serve multiple descriptive purposes within the article and are counted more than once under each relevant “use of source” category. Therefore, percentages do not correspond to actual number of sources, but rather to what the sources are used to say. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

<sup>b</sup>Displays number of times the source type is cited, followed by the number of articles in which the source is cited.

involved. These sources are also used to describe the counterfeit goods involved in an incident, focusing on the results of a seizure (17.7%):

Piracy busts are a regular occurrence these days, with the software industry putting annual losses at about \$12 billion. (*WSJ*, 04/22/02, *(company) Reports Big Loss in Sales from Piracy Ring*)

Descriptions of these seizures vary, but are used to provide details about specific police actions and what was observed during the operation.

Finally, criminal justice sources are cited to illustrate the difficulty in investigating product counterfeiting (26.5%):

The victims, officials said, were not only the tobacco companies whose products were counterfeited but also the federal government, which estimates that cigarette smuggling costs it more than a billion dollars a year in lost fees and revenue, and New York, California and Texas, which together were cheated out of at least \$8 million. (*NYT*, 01/29/04, *US Arrests 10 as Members of Big Cigarette Smuggling Rings*)

These sources demonstrate the uphill battle for officials, working against the tremendous economic incentives of product counterfeiting, requiring cooperation between multiple entities. In this way, the complications of this unique crime are brought out in the way these sources are used to describe product counterfeiting in the stories. The text attributed to criminal justice sources demonstrates that while these sources tend to focus on specific incidents, the impact and complexity of product counterfeiting can also be brought out in their descriptions.

The two other source types frequently cited in product counterfeiting articles are industry and legal sources. They each make up 12.5% of the remaining incident sources and were cited three times in three articles. As industry sources have already been discussed in great detail above, we instead provide a short discussion of the use of legal sources. Legal sources consist of defense attorneys in specific cases, as well as other law firms and lawyers commenting on product counterfeiting. Politicians, legislatures, and legal experts are not included here, as they are coded in separate categories. Defense attorneys provide a short rebuttal to the charges issued against their clients. Defense attorneys are found in few incident stories, but their statements provide insight into the mindset of the criminal defendants found among the sampled articles:

I'd be inclined to want to quit the practice of criminal law if the defendant serves even one day in jail in connection with the outcome of this case. (*NYT*, 04/10/08, *Arrest of Cigarette Seller is a Coup, Brooklyn Officials Say*)

Some defense attorneys simply decline to comment on the case. Others exhibit a denial of wrongdoing on behalf of their client. These sources provide the contrast between the two sides of the criminal case against alleged counterfeiters and are similar to these sources are used to say in traditional crime stories.

## Discussion

Our research identified two types of sources disproportionately represented in product counterfeiting news stories: industry and government. Specific companies or industry officials and those serving in an official government capacity collectively accounted for almost

two-thirds of the total sources cited in the sampled newspaper articles. These findings are not surprising given the context of the product counterfeiting problem and what is known about crime in the media.

The high representation of official sources in product counterfeiting stories is consistent with prior studies on sources used to represent crime in the news media (Brown et al., 1987; Chermak, 1997; Ericson et al., 1991; Fishman, 1980, 1981; Gans, 1979, 2003). Official sources are the initial lens through which crime events are constructed, defining the crime and how it is framed in subsequent news articles (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978). Government officials use their position as authorities to offer their insight into the impact of emerging social problems on society (Chermak, 1997; Gans, 2003; Nichols, 1997). This is especially true for product counterfeiting, where politicians, law enforcement, prosecutors, regulatory agencies, and other high ranking officials utilize the media to spread awareness of their organization's activities (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This finding is most prevalent in stories about specific crime incidents, whereas other articles offered different perspectives.

Where product counterfeiting is truly unique from traditional crime stories lies in the reliance on private industries as sources. These industry sources include for-profit businesses and organizations representing the interests of entire industries. The reliance on companies for information about product counterfeiting makes intuitive sense, as companies making tangible products are the clear victims of product counterfeiting when their products are copied. Industries have a large financial and reputational stake in identifying counterfeit products and spreading awareness. It is logical for reporters to contact companies whose products are being counterfeited for their perspective. These sources have a vested interest in shaping how the story, and thus their organization, is portrayed in the news. They are close to the events as they are occurring, which allows reporters to obtain firsthand information to make the news production process more efficient (Chibnall, 1977; Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1973, 1978). These companies appear to use the media with the intention of shaping public perception of their business and the monetary impacts of purchasing counterfeits.

Consistent with prior studies on crime in the news media (Chermak, 1997), the news appears to function in a way that further legitimizes previously accepted interests, policies, and enforcement strategies (Gans, 1979, 2003; Nichols, 1997; Nichols & Nolan, 2004). Product counterfeiting news is socially constructed to support conventional thinking about business and crime. This is where product counterfeiting is similar to other crimes, where the interests of those in power are more prominently represented. When it comes to product counterfeiting, companies have a substantial financial interest in their image and trademarks. For reasons similar to those of government officials, companies lend their support to the production of news stories about product counterfeiting. On the other hand, the insights of other sources, such as academics, suspects, individual victims, consumers, and the general workforce, are lacking by comparison.

While the socially constructed reality of product counterfeiting is similar to other types of crime, it is also distinctly unique. Besides the inclusion of industry as sources for news stories, product counterfeiting differs from other types of crime in the appearance of alternative points of view to establishment positions. We believe there are two reasons for this. First, product counterfeiting is prone to multiple perspectives due to the involvement of consumers, companies, and government officials. Several articles displayed the rationale behind consumer behavior to purchase counterfeit products, such as the use of online pharmacies to obtain low-cost pharmaceuticals, the copying and distribution of pirated

music, or purchasing knockoff luxury apparel. The inclusion of these perspectives from citizens about product counterfeiting is different from traditional street crimes.

Companies that are involved in different aspects of the distribution chain for a product will have diverse perspectives on the level of accountability of participants within the counterfeit trade. This results in the absence of a single culpable source in many cases, as when one company or government agency gives their organization-centered position on what has occurred. This is contrary to street crime news stories, where official sources tend to dominate the discussion. Second, there is no established public discourse related to product counterfeiting, as there is for robbery, rape, or murder. General consensus of these crimes easily points to their harm to the individual and society at large, requiring no additional elaboration. When describing harms resulting from product counterfeiting, the burden shifts to the source and the reporter to convey the significance of the crime to the reader. This results in product counterfeiting news stories being atypical of other types of crime previously discussed in the media and crime literature.

### ***Limitations***

Several limitations of the current study are worth noting. First is the lack of a national sample of news coverage in favor of two nationally recognized papers. This purposive selection resulted in the New York City Police Department (NYPD) as the most frequently cited local law enforcement agency. This may mean local law enforcement was either overrepresented due to the close proximity of the department to the newspaper or underrepresented because articles are more likely to rely on large companies or federal agencies for stories about product counterfeiting. It also restricted incidents to those originating primarily from the New York region, while other areas of the country are underrepresented. A more representative focus with local newspapers included may yield different findings than those resulting from this study, and further research on the media and product counterfeiting should broaden the scope of newspapers to be sampled.

The analysis is also limited by the sample size. A moderate sample was deliberately chosen to keep the project at a manageable size while still providing sufficient data to draw general conclusions. Larger and varying sample sizes and advanced statistical approaches should be used in future studies to support or refute the findings in this study.

This study is further restricted by the inclusion of only print newspaper stories in the examination of product counterfeiting. Electronic newspaper articles posted to newspaper websites, television news, and “new media” sources may be qualitatively different. Print media sources do not hold the same position in shaping the collective identity and public discourse as they once did due to advances in journalism and technology, and examining the impact of newer types of media is essential for a more complete understanding of product counterfeiting and the media. Future media studies should incorporate new and electronic media into the study of the media and product counterfeiting, and crime in general.

### ***Conclusion***

Similar to prior media and crime studies, we believe sources are presented in news articles primarily to further the agendas of their organizations. Sources are motivated to engage the media when it suits their purposes to present the best possible case for their organizational functions or to refute prior negative media coverage. Reporters for most types of stories tend to use sources that are readily available and they believe will add a level of substance to their portrayal of product counterfeiting. As has been shown when comparing product

counterfeiting with other types of crime, social problems are constructed in the media differently. Where the portrayal of product counterfeiting in the media differs from that of traditional street crimes lies with the reliance on business sources that focus on the impact to the company and the industry, and the use of average citizens to present their opinions about the extent of product counterfeiting. Sources rely directly on their own experience when presenting information to the media, and reporters collectively display their perspectives in the context of the story. Ultimately, the relationship between the media and sources is an exchange of benefits, where sources are able to access a wide audience and news organizations obtain information to fill newspaper content. Both parties benefit through the relationship, although the ability to exhibit an accurate portrayal of the crime can sometimes be lost in the process by relying too much on certain types of sources. Future research should examine the use of sources using different samples and methods and comparing across newspaper organizations, countries, regions, counterfeit types, and other types of crime. By examining these relationships and comparing across multiple variables, we can better understand how sources both influence and are affected by the social construction of crime news stories.

### Acknowledgments

This research was partially supported by the Anti-Counterfeiting and Product Protection Program (A-CAPPP) at Michigan State University. We also thank Dr. Jeremy Wilson and the four anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on early versions of this article.

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